

## **PureBread Deli Positioned for Continued Growth**

**By Carlotta Catullo**

A long-time partnership, a shared passion for the restaurant trade, and a keen entrepreneurial instinct are just the right mix for two driven entrepreneurs.

Ken Alkire and Mike Nardozzi, co-owners of PureBread Deli, celebrated the opening of their third eatery in the Center Pointe Plaza in Christiana in July 2004. This latest addition to their Pike Creek and Greenville caf  s appeals to diverse tastes with its extended hours, expansive menu, and their trademark canine d  cor — right down to the signature paint-splattered flooring.

Alkire and Nardozzi first met in 1998 when they were general managers for a local restaurant group. After operating multiple restaurants for the group, Alkire eventually managed the company's financial operations and Nardozzi oversaw its marketing and sales programs.

Nardozzi was initially interested in starting a sandwich shop in the South where he attended college. After researching national models, both agreed a quality product with a unique theme was the best option for their Delaware restaurant. Not surprisingly, both partners are dog lovers - Alkire owns a Jack Russell and Nardozzi has a Chesapeake Bay retriever.

At PureBread Deli, the proof is in the dough — literally. Its "Mixed Breed" and "Best-in-Show" sandwiches feature a fresh array of store-baked breads, bagels, rolls, and baguettes. There is also a tempting slate of soups and salads and assorted desserts rounding out the menu. Add an amazing staff, a playful website ([www.purebread.com](http://www.purebread.com)), and a cozy ambiance, and you have PureBread's recipe for success.

Rarely does a small business escape start-up challenges and PureBread Deli is no exception. Opening the first location in Pike Creek in June 2001 meant taking 60 to 70 percent pay cuts from the entrepreneurs' former jobs, along with nearly tripling their workload. Money was tight during the first seven months of operation which meant they didn't pay themselves initially. The pair was forced to get creative. The restaurant's distinctive paint splattered floor is the result of running out of funds when it came time to finish the floor. It became such a highlight at their first caf   that they decided to incorporate the effect into the other locations.

Nardozzi and Alkire credit much of their early success to the assistance they received from the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), especially counselor Ray Smith and former counselor Lucinda Papa, who continues to advise them throughout their growth. SCORE is a 10,500-member national volunteer organization sponsored by the SBA. The organization matches volunteer business management counselors with small business clients in need of free expert advice.

Thanks to three U.S. Small Business Administration-backed loans through Wilmington Trust, PureBread was able to start and expand the business from one to three restaurants in the past three years. Nardozzi and Alkire emphasize their reliance on a team of experts consisting of their banker, accountant, lawyer, and SCORE counselors.

The SBA's 7(a) loan program operates through private-sector banks which provide small business loans that are guaranteed by the SBA. By providing this guaranty, the SBA helps many small businesses like PureBread Deli obtain financing to start, build and grow their operations. SBA lending to Delaware businesses tripled in the past four years to a record 290 loans totaling \$35,771,000. During fiscal year 2004, SBA lending to Delaware small businesses ranged from \$2,500 to \$2 million.

"Helping Ken and Mike achieve their financial goals and supporting the growth of PureBread Deli is a real inspiration for me," said Marc Pelletier, relationship manager at Wilmington Trust. "I love it when entrepreneurs initially talk about their passions and goals, rather than focusing too much attention on the deal, the space, or the business model."

While busy overseeing three restaurants and a staff of 60 employees, including four managers and four bakers, PureBread's owners give back to the community by contributing to local charity benefits and high school fund raisers. Remarkably, they donate 200 loaves of bread to the Food Bank every week.

Alkire and Nardozzi's next major business objective is to develop a strategic growth plan for the company. The pair recently opened a PureBread corporate office where they will focus on their business expansion. From the beginning they envisioned expanding to regional and national markets. Their short-term goal is to have 10 restaurants within the next five years.

"PureBread Deli's success reflects enormous credit on Mike Nardozzi and Ken Alkire – thanks to their energy, commitment to their vision and entrepreneurial skill," said Dick Logan, chair of the Delaware SCORE Chapter.

Nardozzi believes that anyone can be a successful small business owner as long as they have an entrepreneurial mindset, unlimited drive, and a good business plan. The two entrepreneurs also stressed the need to have a strong work ethic and admitted to being compulsive planners with a contingency plan for everything.

Catch words and phrases come easily to this creative team, but their business advice is more straightforward: "Manage the present, plan for the future."

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